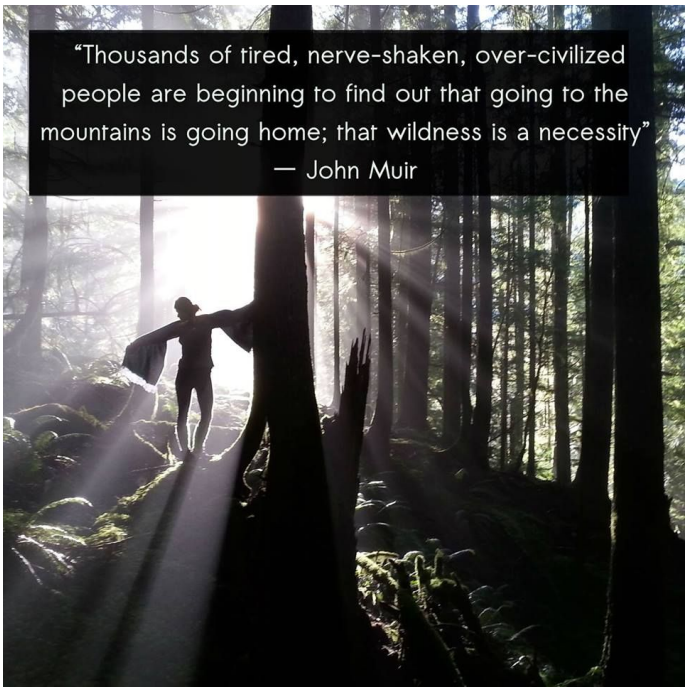
Moving Music Outdoors:

Why and how to promote outdoor music-making



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Abstract

My inquiry will explore how creating and playing music in the outdoors affects music education outcomes for students. In recent years, there has been an explosion of research indicating that moving certain school subjects outside, especially science and physical education, can boost student engagement and achievement in school. Moreover, outdoor learning can be used as a vehicle to promote learning in students with developmental disabilities and for incorporating Indigenous content into the curriculum. This inquiry will be presented as a paper and lesson plan, presenting evidence from the literature to substantiate claims concerning outdoor learning (the "why") and showing how outdoor learning can be incorporated in a practical manner into the music and art classroom (the "how").

The "why"

Why should educators incorporate music education into the outdoor environment? Elliott (2008) theorizes that there are at least six dimensions of musical meaning to listen for in pieces of music, which include "musical design; stylistic issues; expressions of emotions; musical representations of people, places, and things; musical expressions of various kinds of beliefs (personal, political, and so on); and how all of the above are interpreted and performed." (54) I interpret this guideline to mean that music which is rooted to and performed in outside spaces possesses as much meaning as any indoor equivalent. However, there is no current mandate in BC that encourages the pedagogy of music outdoors, literally leaving a whole world of musical possibilities untouched.

The null curriculum

Indeed, we must question why indoor education is the normative environment for learning music. Could it be that there is a null curriculum in effect? Defined as value taken away from a subject area due to its lack of inclusion in policy, null curriculum transmits deep underlying messages to educators across the province. The new curriculum developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (BCME) contains explicit standards encouraging K-9 students to learn science in the outdoors. It states that students should "experience and interpret the local environment" as part of their science education (Science 2015).

The new arts curriculum, as befits its subjective nature, is more open to interpretation. It makes mention that K-9 students should "explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences" in the process of art creation, and make use of artistic environments (BCME Arts Education 2015). However, the mandate of 'exploring' (as opposed to 'experiencing') does not necessarily imply the teaching of place in its context, and artistic environment is vague enough to mean any space deemed to be creative. Beames (2012) questions the general acceptance that school should be taught indoors, and urges readers to consider the inherent biases that force educators to justify teaching outdoors. (18) Similarly, I question why outdoor education is apparent in BC science education and not the arts.

Outdoor learning for meeting the new curriculum

In fact, although it is not explicitly stated in the arts curriculum, outdoor education could be used to more effectively meet the Core Competencies and Learning Standards of the new BC curriculum for music. There are four big ideas of the K-9 arts curriculum that change mainly in wording for older students. Outdoor learning in music would enhance the student ability to learn two of these four concepts. "Creative expression is a means to explore and share one's identity within a community" can be better met through moving the music classroom outside, where students are inherently part of the larger public space as opposed to the cloistered bounds of their classroom walls. I believe that increasing practice and performance outdoors encourages informal music making, so that students are more comfortable with sharing their music outside of the music classroom. Like busking, outdoor music making also contains far more possibility for spontaneous engagement with community members, and on a beautiful sunny day there is no better venue!

The next two big ideas explain that students need to understand that "artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities" and "exploring works of art exposes us to diverse values, knowledge, and perspectives." (BCME Arts Education 2015) Indeed, moving music outdoors can be part of an educator's toolkit for showing possible ways of experimenting with music of other cultural backgrounds that have historically been performed more in the outdoors than the western tradition of music. Outdoor music-making could be especially beneficial to the increased inclusion of First Nations music, which the new curriculum aims to embed across all subject areas, (BCME Introduction, 2015, 7) As will be discussed later, the deep connection between First Nations knowledge and the land means that outdoor learning is an excellent

vehicle for meeting the requirement of increased integration of First Nations culture and promoting academic success for Aboriginal students.

Research to support outdoor learning

Not all research is created equal, and I tried to base my findings for the benefits of outdoor learning from systematic reviews as much as possible, since this research form is considered the gold standard for academic rigour. I could not find any systematic reviews directly related to outdoor music education, which could be a field of further research interest. However, I did find meta-analysis related to the benefits of outdoor learning in general. Davies et al (2013) points to the finding that learning outside of the classroom and in an outdoor environment for part of students' education seems to promote creative development, which is possibly related to increased sense of ownership and collaboration. (84) Outside, students were perceived to own time and space to a much higher degree, and evidence of teamwork was more likely than the predominantly individual focus found indoors.

Furthermore, Davies et al (2013) discuss forest schools with creative environments, pointing to freedom that allows the use of multiple senses and intelligences and time and space for individual learning styles. (85) In a case control study, O'Brien (2009) found that forest school boosted student social skills, self esteem and self confidence; improved student communication skills, motivation, physical motor skills and focus; increased student knowledge and understanding; produced new perspectives in educators about their students; and increased students' discussion with family and friends outside of school about their learning. (50)

Despite the lack of specificity towards outdoor music, this evidence could nevertheless point to a pedagogical need to teach more music outdoors. Educators may be able to effectively teach a greater diversity of learners than may be possible indoors, and students may take greater ownership of music in an outdoor environment. However, not only would be daunting and impractical to try and take all music in the schools outdoors, it would not be educationally sound to make such an extreme move. Beames (2012) insists that outdoor and indoor learning do not need to compete, since "good pedagogy happens where it is most relevant and suitable". (27) Weather and expensive equipment are practical considerations, and students should not be prevented from learning certain music styles or instruments because of a music class with an overzealous outdoor philosophy. Beames (2012) presents a concentric ring model of outdoor learning, in which school grounds form the innermost ring, followed by local neighbourhood, day excursions and overnight stays and expeditions. This model indicates that outdoor learning should start at the local level and then work outward. (6-7) Therefore, music class that utilizes the schoolyard and surrounding community would be part of the development towards a connection between students and place that enlarges with time, expanding the scope of community engagement that students can experience in their education.

There are potential drawbacks to current research on the benefits of outdoor learning that must be considered. The scope of research and development in outdoor learning is limited, including the sample sizes of children and teachers investigated. Case studies and action research are overwhelmingly used for studying outdoor learning, and therefore more rigorous methods, such as meta-analysis and randomized control trials, would significantly strengthen the argument for outdoor learning. (Bentsen, 2009, 35) The lack of rigorous evidence means that the

generalizability of existing literature is limited until further studies are conducted. In particular, more studies on the effects of musical outdoor learning would strengthen the connection between outdoor learning and music education. Experimental and publication bias may also skew the current literature on outdoor learning. Teachers and schools who are already enthusiastic about outdoor education participate in the the research, and there is potential that studies showing negative results do not get published. (Bentsen, 2009, 35)

Pedagogical and practical considerations for an outdoor classroom

There are many important considerations when deciding how to implement outdoor music education. It is important for educators to develop a teaching philosophy that enhances the educational benefit of outdoor learning. O'Brien (2009) offers principles of forest school that support a creative and supportive atmosphere in the outdoors:

1. Create learning-based, rather than performance-based, expectations of students.
2. Learners should be viewed as active participants in their learning.
3. Relationship between student and teacher should be built upon guidance, as opposed to instruction.
4. Learners are guided in tasks that have implicit worth and are ends to themselves.
5. Assessment used as and for learning utilized to promote shared understanding. (47)

This learning framework supports a constructivist approach to education, moving away from the conventional role of teacher as instructor of students to one where student experimentation and problem-solving are given priority. (O'Brien, 2009, 47)

As important as pedagogical ethos may be to educational outcomes, practical considerations must be carefully planned for in order for outdoor learning to be a safe and enjoyable experience for all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and administrators). Let the office know you are going outside so that administrators know where you are, and bring a cell phone for contact in case a situation comes up. If you go off the school grounds, make sure you will have access to a first aid kit for allergic reactions or other emergencies. (Broda, 2007, 65-66) At the beginning of the year, it is best to time outdoor learning classes as short excursions of about 15-20 mins with very focused objectives until students understand that it is an extension of the class rather than recess. (Broda, 2007, 68) Make sure to survey weather conditions and the usability of your outdoor area prior to the lesson. Be sure to make the rules of the outdoor classroom very clear inside before heading out, and then repeat them once outside. Such rules should include clear boundaries and signals for getting attention and regrouping. (Broda, 2007, 69) Before going out, double check that you have all the necessary equipment you will need, as the class cannot be left unattended outside without an adult.

Broda (2007) encourages the use of circles as an excellent approach to the challenge of communicating with students in the outdoor environment. (72) Circle music games also promote the sense of communal music-making, because all students are facing each other and the teacher. Since one of benefits of the outdoors is the increased sense of ownership of learning by students, consult them by asking when they want to play music outdoors again. (79) Lastly, the outdoors is an uncontrolled environment, and the unexpected happens. It is important that the teacher is not only alert to danger, but is open to spontaneity and surprises that can benefit lessons. (73)

Enhancing education for students with special needs

Learning music outdoors can positively affect outcomes for students with special needs. As Kern (2006) relates, children with autism can be more deeply engaged with school subjects through music as it fosters greater motivation for participation in social activities and increases development of curiosity and exploratory interest. Kern (2006) found that music making in an outdoor setting acted as a vehicle for children with autism to make deeper social connections with their peers. However, Kern (2006) was careful to point out that it was not solely the musical equipment responsible, as they found that a "combination of environmental adaptations and individualized interventions", such as personalized songs, were necessary for a benefit to become apparent. As such, just as required in the indoor setting, outdoor music-making requires educators to consider how they will adapt their lessons to meet the needs of all their students.

Enhancing inclusion of Indigenous content

Outdoor music education can promote the integration of Aboriginal content in the music curriculum as well as meet requirements of the First People's Principles for Learning (FPPL). The curriculum content states that students need to learn about "traditional and contemporary Aboriginal arts and arts-making processes" and "a variety of regional and national works of art and artistic traditions from diverse cultures, communities, times, and places." (BCME Arts Education 2015) Note that exposure to diverse places may include learning about traditions connected to the land, which is intrinsic to Aboriginal culture. According to Boyea (1999), an incident occurred on a large university campus wherein a sacred Ojibway song was played indoors to a class, much to the outrage of the local Ojibwa population. The song was played out

of its proper context, as it was never meant to be played indoors to non-initiated, non-Indigenous people. (109) This event serves to show the importance of understanding the intended purpose and context of cultural artifacts and traditions.

The FPPL promotes an ideal that "Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors. (FPPL) This ideal of learning demonstrates the inextricable tie between education and the land according to Aboriginal worldview. Furthermore, new BC curriculum content states that students need to learn about "traditional and contemporary Aboriginal arts and arts-making processes" and "a variety of regional and national works of art and artistic traditions from diverse cultures, communities, times, and places." (BCME Arts Education 2015) Note that exposure to diverse places could include learning about traditions connected to the land.

McIntyre (2012) writes that an authentic experience of First Nations music requires certain settings, recommending lullabies as a safe genre to explore. Furthermore, she prompts educators to reach out to the local First Nations community, as this presence is the surest path to an authentic experience. (26) Through this route, educators can provide mentors to their students and grow a classroom philosophy based on encouraging group success, rather than individual pursuit for achievement. The result is increased intrinsic motivation and collaborative learning supporting the students' growth as musicians." (McIntyre, 2012, 26) I plan to invite a respected Indigenous community member to help teach a song to my grade four class during my long practicum, which I hope will meet the dual purpose of avoiding inappropriate use of song while forging a connection between my students and the local Indigenous people. To deepen the understanding of the underlying meaning behind song, Boyea (2000) recommends

supplementing Indigenous music education with storytelling, so I therefore plan to incorporate this literary association in conjunction with music. (15)

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The "how"

I have developed a lesson plan with the central theme of building drums and learning from a local Indigenous community member a song from their culture that will be learned and

performed outdoors. They will be painted after the style of Norval Morrisseau. During my presentation of this inquiry, I will demonstrate a drum that I have personally made and painted to discuss the important points of my paper. Partnered with a knowledgeable First Nations colleague in the program who will help teach me a song, I will co-lead an outdoor music lesson I plan to teach my practicum class.

Authentic First Nations Music in an Outdoor Learning Environment

Contributors: Lisa Jensen and Kenthen Thomas

Grade: 4
Subject: Music, Social Studies

Date: March 2016
Time: One 60 min session

Celebrating National Aboriginal Day with song and dance
Source: Shoreline Beacon

Rationale:

Outdoor learning is gaining popularity in Canada as a pedagogical strategy to promote student engagement and interest in school material. There is mounting research pointing to the benefits of bringing the elementary classroom outside. Furthermore, the new BC curriculum states that arts education should explore concepts of environment and place, which can be met in part by conducting more music lessons in the outdoor environment. Such content must be integrated across the curriculum in order that Aboriginal students and the community feel represented in school teaching, and so that non-Aboriginal students gain a real understanding and appreciation of Canada's First Peoples. First Nations music is inextricably linked to the land, and as such is best represented in this environmental context. To create an authentic experience, an Elder or respected community member will be invited in so that Indigenous knowledge is taught directly from its cultural source. The new BC curriculum reflects this shift in educational thinking, and therefore it is necessary to incorporate First Nations content, including the First People's Principles for Learning.

Big Idea(s) :
Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences
Creative expression is a means to explore and share one's identity within a community.
Artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities.
Exploring works of art exposes us to diverse values, knowledge, and perspectives.

Curricular Competencies

Students will be able to use the following creative process(es) to create and respond to art:

- Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences
- Explore relationships among cultures, societies, and the arts
- Observe, listen, describe, inquire and predict how musicians use movements, techniques, and environments to create and communicate
- Develop technical skills to improve the quality of artistic creations
- Express, feelings, ideas, and experiences in creative ways

Concepts and Content

- Elements and principles that create meaning in music: beat/pulse, duration, rhythm, tempo, pitch, timbre, dynamics, form, texture
- Movements, tools and techniques to support arts activities
- Traditional and contemporary Aboriginal arts and arts-making processes
- A variety of regional and national works of artistic traditions from diverse cultures, communities, times, and places
- Personal and collective responsibility associated with creating, experiencing, and performing in a safe learning environment

Essential Questions

- How does learning outdoors benefit our learning of music and First Nations culture?
- How does learning First Nations songs from an Elder increase our understanding of this musical tradition?

How I Will Teach This

Materials and Technology:

- Hand drums
- Drum sticks
- Gift for guest (tobacco pouch or other appropriate gift, thank you letter, honorarium)
- Gym as a back-up area to use in case of bad weather
- Optional: video camera

Preparation:

This lesson plan is ideally used in conjunction with an art unit plan in which students create their own drums, which ensures that all students will have drums despite the equipment or funding of their school's music program. Student creation of drums also promotes respect for the instruments and an ability to personalize the drums, making them special and unique to each player. Reading the stories and history of local First Nations culture prior to this lesson will deepen context. Explicit consent will be required from the Elder in advance if a video is taken. Ensure that someone is there to meet the Elder half an hour early at the front door and that they are offered tea/refreshment and a private place to gather themselves before the class. This protocol is subject to the cultural traditions of the local First Nations, so anyone who is adapting this lesson should take care to familiarize themselves with proper local protocol.

Resources:

"First Nations Elder Protocol." Retrieved from http://www.ictinc.ca/blog/first-nation-elder-protocol

Overview	**Timing**
Introduction and extending an invitation: Someone should show the Elder where the class is to meet. All participants will preferably move to an outdoor field by the school, but in the case of inclement weather the gym can also be used. The teacher directs the students to form a circle and hold their drums without playing.	5 mins
The teacher will introduce the Elder, acknowledging that the land is unceded, ancestral territory of the local First Nations group. The teacher will extend an invitation to the Elder by offering a tobacco pouch (a student volunteer may hand this gift over).	5 mins
The Elder will lead the class at this point, who at their discretion may tell the stories and/or teach the song and dance of their culture. If the Elder has given consent, the teacher or another adult may capture a video of the process so that teacher and students have a memory aid to continue learning the song in future sessions in regular music classes.	40 mins
The teacher can prompt the students to think of any questions they have for the Elder before their time is up. Students and teacher will thank the Elder for the lesson, giving an envelope with a thank you letter inside. The honoraria should be given in private after the lesson, and the Elder should be bid farewell at the front door again.	10 mins

Cross-curricular Connections:

Social Studies - Study of First Nations contemporary art and music in Canada
Language arts - A story associated with the specific song and/or local culture explored in the lesson will be told in order to build context for the relevance of the music.
Art- Students will learn about local First Nations musical traditions through making and playing their own drum. An elder or community member should be invited to teach the students a song and dance, so that the students have a practical use for their drum.

Adaptations
Students with physical disabilities will be included by ensuring that the outdoor arena chosen is accessible and flat. The dance associated with the song can be done “on the spot” so that anyone in a wheelchair does not need to choose between drumming or wheeling. Alternatively, if the student prefers to move around, they can choose not to drum or an eager helper can push them while they drum.

Extensions
Students can write a journal entry describing their experience of learning First Nations culture from an Elder, and future music lessons can be conducted to more deeply learn and therefore remember the music.